

February 28, 2022

Nicole Elkon  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Private Sector Exchange  
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs  
U.S. Department of State  
Washington, D.C.

VIA EMAIL: [ElkonNL@state.gov](mailto:ElkonNL@state.gov)

Re: Request for relief for Ukrainian exchange students

Dear Secretary Elkon,

I write today on behalf of NAFSA: Association of International Educators to request that the Department of State issue a “special student relief” notice in the Federal Register as soon as possible for Ukrainian students in the United States who are in J-1 status in response to the recent invasion of their country and the resulting crisis.

As you know, a February 22, 2022 [announcement](#) from the Department of State indicates that consular services in Ukraine remain closed. President Biden [remarked](#) on February 24, 2022, that “The Russian military has begun a brutal assault on the people of Ukraine without provocation, without justification, without necessity,” and the Department of State [Ukraine Travel Advisory](#) of that same date reported that due to the attacks on major Ukrainian cities, “the Ukrainian government closed its airspace to commercial flights ... [and] ... declared a state of emergency.”

We anticipate that, as conditions continue to deteriorate, Ukrainian students in the United States may experience severe financial impacts as both students and their sponsors have difficulty in accessing their funds in Ukraine.

As the turmoil and emergent circumstances in Ukraine continue, J-1 students from Ukraine would greatly benefit from the availability of Special Student Relief, which, if patterned after prior Department notices\*, would allow specified J–1 students to engage in on-campus employment for

more than 20 hours per week, and suspend the applicability of eligibility requirements for off-campus employment authorization, and allow J–1 students who found it necessary to reduce their normal course of study in order to engage in this employment to be considered to be maintaining status and pursuing a full course of study. This collection of benefits is commonly known as "special student relief."

As the situation in Ukraine continues to decline, we ask that you consider and support this request, and to please forward it quickly through the necessary channels within the Department.

Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request for Special Student Relief to aid the challenges that exchange visitor students from Ukraine are currently facing.

Sincerely,

*[Signature Redacted]*

Esther D. Brimmer, DPhil  
Executive Director & CEO  
NAFSA: Association of International Educators

\* The Department has exercised its authority and discretion twice before to grant a package of benefits commonly referred to as “special student relief.” We ask the Department to exercise this authority again, in the case of Ukraine. The two prior DOS notices are:

- [63 FR 34276](#) (June 24, 1998). A 1998 notice by legacy USIA, providing benefits to J-1 students whose means of financial support came from Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, or the Philippines, during the financial crisis that impacted those nations at that time; and
- [76 FR 33993](#) (June 10, 2011). A 2011 notice by DOS providing benefits to J-1 students whose means of financial support come from Libya, and whose financial support has been disrupted, reduced, or eliminated due to turmoil in their home country.